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AUTHOR Moran, Michael J.
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ABSTRACT

This examination of the future role of food and agriculture in world peace and prosperity presents a regional cross-country view of the Caribbean countries with emphasis on the Caricom English speaking countries within a global food system environment. Following an introductory section, the second of six sections focuses on two broad agricultural objectives, farm structure attitude toward agriculture, traditional crops, food imports and self-sufficiency, consumption patterns, and growing unemployment in the Caribbean region. Section 3, "Structural Adjustment and the Food System," outlines guidelines for future harmonization of policies proposed at a 1984 Conference of Heads of Government. Special attention is given to the promotion of agricultural re-development, agricultural diversification and exports, and the management of production and marketing. Section 4 examines major trends reflecting a movement towards greater market orientation and interdependence. Section 5, which focuses on three major issues to consider in the development of a more equitable world food and agricultural system, concludes that policy makers must: (1) ask themselves who benefits from food and agricultural reforms and how these changes move the system toward access to nutritious food for everyone; (2) "make haste slowly"--starting from the real situation rather than the ideal and determining what is possible; and (3) take a risk sharing attitude by sharing the responsibility of success or failure in future food and agricultural development. The final section calls for world cooperation in food and agricultural development. (LH)

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FROM CUTLASS TO AGRIBUSINESS: Caribbean Food and Agriculture in Transition within a Global System

by

Michael J. Moran

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FROM CUTLASS TO AGRIBUSINESS: Caribbean Food and Agriculture in Transition within a Global System

Michael J. Moran

I. INTRODUCTION

The topic of this session is "Food and Agriculture: A key to tomorrow's peace and prosperity.

What will be the future role of food and agriculture and for whom? To answer this question is obviously a task of analysis and assumptions. It depends on individual country goals and their interaction with the global food system, and the reconciliation between commercial and non-commercial agriculture in facing the persistent hunger problem.

The restructuring of countries from agricultural to industrial society and from industrial to what is now called an information society has quickened for many countries. John Naisbitt, in his best selling book Megatrends, stated that in the agricultural period, the time orientation was to the past, i.e., how to plant, how to harvest, and how to store. In the industrial society, the time orientation is now, and in the information society, the time orientation is to the future. Most countries of the world are being exposed to all three time orientations simultaneously.

Experience shows that as a result of successful general economic development, the agricultural sector declines while industry and the service sector increases. However, the business of agriculture continues to be the most important sector in the world economy. It employs

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Michael Moran is Director, Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), Barbados, West Indies.

almost half of the world labor force, dominates the economies of most developing countries, and accounts for half of consumers' personal income expenditure.

In order to address the future role of food and agriculture related to peace and prosperity more specifically, I will take the case of the Caribbean countries. Rather than stressing a global approach, I will focus on a regional cross-country level view with emphasis on the Caricom English speaking countries within a global food system environment. A limiting factor in analyzing the future role of the Caribbean food and agriculture sector is present unavailability of a reliable statistical base. Nevertheless, existing data and personal experience will serve as a basis for the following analysis.

II. CARIBBEAN SETTING

Small countries represent a significant proportion of the world nation-states. In the Commonwealth alone there are 31 of which 25 are small island nations. In common with most small developing countries, the Caribbean islands have found it difficult to reconcile their aspirations towards economic independence with their marginally viable economies. Early history records that the islands focused on export agriculture which limited popular access to the best soils and fostered a dependence on imported foods. In fact today nearly all economic activities depend in some way on outside linkages: agriculture, tourism, seasonal migrantion, industry and communication networks.

The complex problems facing the Caribbean islands arise from their very small sizes, economic fragmentation and the lack of coordinated food and agricultural strategies for economic development. They have been adversely affected by an unfavourable international economic environment since 1978, e.g, second big oil shock, worldwide recession, low prices for important Caribbean commodities, protectionism, debt, service problems and natural disasters. Just as important as the international shock waves are the domestic structural, technological and human resources deficiencies in the countries. This situation is

manifested in excessive dependencies on imported food and deep seated problems in many of the traditional export crops (sugar, bananas, citrus, cocoa, arrowroot, and nutmeg).

Agriculture is the most important of the directly productive sectors in most countries, providing 20% of total output and 30% of employment. The dominant export crop is sugar followed by bananas.

The general policy followed by these countries focuses on two broad objectives:

1. Rehabilitation of the principal agricultural export crops.

2. Development of sources of supply within the region and each country for currently imported foods.

Two sets of problems face the achievements of these objectives. One related to structural and the other technical issues operating in an environment of small size island states having a brief period of independence.

The structural problems relate to the following stress factors: balance of payments, debt serving, exchange rate, consumption patterns, land holdings patterns and attitudes towards farming. The technical issues encompass: poor use of available technology, deficient research and extension programmes, natural resource utilization, public food policies, institutional services, infrastructure, production and food marketing costs.

2.1 Farm Structure

Agriculture in the Caribbean region consists of two major groups: estates or plantations and small farms. It is estimated that 95% of the farm holdings in the region are less than 25 acres in size representing 30% of total farm acreage. In recent

years, a small number of plantation farmers have become active in the crop diversification efforts, producing vegetable and fruit for export and domestic consumption. There are a large number of farmers, between 50 and 60%, with less than five acres are occupied in agriculture on a part-time basis.

2.2 Attitude towards Agriculture

Agricultural work is viewed as unattractive. Few young people wish to pursue this vocation and the educational system does little to encourage it. The average age of the farmer is estimated to be over 50. The urban drift is widespread. The stigma traditionally attached to agriculture is reinforced by the long hours, low wages and hard work in hot tropical conditions.

2.3 Traditional Crops

The future of sugar, traditionally the most important export crop is mixed at best. In the immediate and mid-term, this industry will provide employment, income and foreign exchange but at a high cost.The sugar market is shrinking as a result of the declining quota, restrictions, competition from beet sugar, corn (fructose), artificial sweeteners and high cost of production. There have been declines in export earnings from bananas, rice, cocoa, nutmeg and the virtual disappearance of the previously profitable arrowroot market. Part of the problem is the sharp fall in the value of sterling against the US dollar. But quality control, productivity, disease and over supply are also factors for the declines.

2.4 Food Imports and Self-Sufficiency

The Caribbean is a heavy importer of food. One estimate of gross imports of food, drink and tobacco is over one billion US$;

and net import after deducting agricultural efforts, amounts to over US$500 million.

Barbados alone imported US $80 million and Trinidad and Tobago $372 million of food in 1984. The widening of the negative food trade balance is expected to continue, unless drastic measures are taken. This situation puts significant pressure on balance of payments, and could reduce the ability to import basic food commodities needed to maintain the nutritional status of the population.

It is estimated that more than 40% of the Region's intake of energy and protein is supplied from extra-regional sources. The President of the Caribbean Development Bank recently stated, "we in the region are long on consumption and short on production".

TABLE 1 indicates the food trade balance by commodity category.

FOOD TRADE BALANCE BY CATEGORY

1979-80 Average[a]

(millions of dollars)

COUNTRY	CEREALS AND PRESERVATIVES		MEAT AND PRESERVATIVES		DAIRY PRODUCTS AND EGGS		FRUITS AND VEGETABLES		SUGAR AND HONEY		ANIMALS AND VEGETABLES	
	S*	D*	S	D	S	D	S	D	S	D	S	D
Barbados	-	14.1	-	17.6	-	6.5	-	9.6	49.8	--	-	5.7
Guyana	18.5	-	-	0.3	-	14.7	-	1.9	135.8	-	-	5.6
Haiti	-	47.8	1.4	-	--	11.0	-	1.1	-	4.3	-	2.4
Jamaica	-	81.8	-	19.7	-	22.5	21.5	-	53.9	-	-	11.0
Suriname	-	5.0	-	0.4	-	4.0	4.1	-	-	1.4	-	0.8
Trinidad & Tobago	57.0	-	150.2	-	12.4	-	-	5.3	-	5.4	5.4	-

a. Categories by FAO classification, surpluses are net exports and deficits net imports

*S = Surplus D = Deficit

SOURCE: Compiled from IDB, Economic and Social Progress in Latin America 1983 and 1984

The irony is that many of the items of food imported are produced in countries whose climates, with their seasonal variations limits the period over which they can be produced. The Caribbean islands have a tropical climate which permits them to grow food all year round. They have some unique problems, but also the potential to solve them.

2.5 Consumption Patterns

A major problem is the high foreign consumption with preference to imported foods. The pattern of food demand and many other goods is strongly influenced by external tastes and standards, influenced directly by tourist, external travel, supermarkets and indirectly by the media. Consequently, the import bill for food remains high, while the capacity to begin or increase local production of many food products remains low. Unless this problem changes, unemployment and rising food prices could result in a very difficult future for the low income groups.

2.6 Growing Unemployment

One of the most significant negative issues facing the Caribbean economies is the increase in the rate of unemployment. Presently, it varies from 14-40%. Even in a stable economy like Barbados, unemployment rose from 15.6% in 1983 to 18.3% of the labor force in 1984 and continues to rise. The world-wide problem of recent recession has had its effects on the economies of small nations in the Caribbean. The lack of economic growth and growth in unemployment co-exist. However, the export/crop diversification strategy currently being developed in the islands could have serious effects on unemployment if a balanced approach between labour and capital intensive technology is not followed.

In response to this situation, most Caribbean islands have embarked on more aggressive agricultural transformation and rural

development programmes by implementing crops diversification, export promotion strategies to increase output, obtain badly needed foreign exchange and a higher degree of self-sufficiency.

III. STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT AND THE FOOD SYSTEM

At Nassau 1984, the Conference of Heads of Governments came to grips with the fundamental problems of structural adjustment. The Governments endorsed a set of policies, both national and regional in scope, designed to promote structural change. The decisions reached represented an attack on immediate problems and guidelines for the future harmonization of policies of the Caribbean states. The proposals in the NASSAU understanding includes:

(1) "greater orientation toward exports";

(2) "further action for the better utilization of agricultural land and the modernization of the agriculture sector";

(3) "greater national and regional self-sufficiency in food";

(4) "determined efforts to develop a broadly based agro-industrial environment";

(5) "measures to contract demand through drastic reductions in public and private consumption expenditure, the compression of imports and more restructive monetary policies";

(6) "strengthening of machinery for national planning";

(7) "involvement of all sectors of the societies in the processes of plan formation, implementation and monitoring";

They call specifically for the private sector and the youth to make a contribution to the solution of the problems. However, to date at

least nine countries have failed to implement the Nassau Understanding. The Caricom initiatives are not easy to implement, the primary loyalties are confined to one's island.

3.1 Promoting Agriculture Re-development

The future performance of the agriculture sector is critical in the structural adjustment effort. It can either accelerate or act as a brake on development. The following issues represent areas in which some recent efforts to promote food and agricultural development play a major role.

- Develop new complimentary foreign exchange earners, such as, exotic fruits, vegetables, sea island cotton, West Indian cherries, etc. The traditional foreign exchange earners are not expected to expand.

- Lower the intolerably high food import bill which represents a tremendous drain on foreign exchange.

- Address the high unemployment issue.

- Provide opportunities for small farmers by emphasizing more labour intensive fruit and vegetable production marketing programmes along with cash crops and food processing industries.

- Improve the nutritional status of consumers by providing local vegetables and fruits at reasonable prices.

The Caribbean countries are firmly set to follow the export promotion strategy of traditional and non-traditional commodities. Internal savings are insufficient to finance the desired growth rate. Concessionary funds will become more difficult to obtain in the future. Consequently, borrowing will come with a high price tag for small countries which have a limited resource base. (For example, Jamaica

debt saving for this year will be about 40% of total budget outlay and 56% of projected export earnings). Export trade is seen as absolutely necessary for economic development, and agriculture and food are key sectors in this strategy.

3.2 Diversification and Export

Agricultural diversification has clearly emerged as a priority strategy for transforming the agricultural sector in the Caribbean. This strategy itself is not new. What is new, however, relates to the concerted effort directed primarily at the export marketing of non-traditional commodities in large scale relative to size of the Islands. Until recently, efforts to improve non-traditional agricultural products were directed primarily at the domestic market.

The following are some recent efforts to promote crop diversification/export-import substitution development:

- St. Lucia is moving to diversify the banana base agricultural sector primarily to cope with local demand, make substitutions for imported products, and improve the quality of bananas.

- Grenada plans to expand significantly and diversify its agricultural sector in the direction of tropical exotic fruits, fresh vegetables and ornamentals.

- Barbados is committed to developing the agricultural sector focusing on the non-sugar sector: fruits and vegetables and integrated livestock development.

- Jamaica recently announced plans to put 20,000 acres of former sugar lands under other crops as part of an agricultural diversification program implemented three years ago.

- St. Vincent and the Grenadines announced they will close their sugar industries this year and concentrate on economic diversification programmed over the next 5 years with more emphasis on the area of agriculture (vegetable production).

- Dominica continues to emphasize a diversification of its agricultural sector with major emphasis on fruit crops.

The overall structural adjustment in the agricultural sector and the emerging crop diversification/export marketing thrust have important implications for each country, the region and international trade relations as a whole.One study estimates that by 1990 there will be 400,000 tons of surplus fruit in the Eastern Caribbean alone.

3.3 Managing Production and Marketing

One of the most critical issues related to the diversification/ export promotions strategy is how it can improve marketing benefits for both large and small farmers. Back-yard fruit tree farmers will not be able to compete with those planting pure orchard stands of 5, 20, 50 acres. Two or three such farmers can supply the fruit for an entire island like Barbados. The same can be said for other crops or livestock such as dairy. Experience has shown there are serious consequences in pursuing a predominant export promotion strategy if the industrial and service industries are not able to absorb agricultural related labor. New technology is required for export market development, economies of scale and competitive production cost. Shedding labour is a unfortunate consequence. The dominant exported agriculture could frustrate domestic food agriculture, particularly when the former is characterized by large scale operations in mini-domestic markets.

Export commodity regrets dumped on the small local markets can have serious implications on the domestic structure and

adversely effect small farmers producing similar food crops for domestic consumption. It is impossible to isolate export marketing from internal market development. In the long-run, export marketing success will depend on the efficient development of a national production marketing system, both from an input supply and commodity system perspective.

Given the risk aversion common to farmers, the extent to which they are willing to invest resources in export crop production is determined by their ability to produce adequate domestic food supplies. Consequently, domestic production and export production may be complementary, not competitive. Increased productivity of the former allows increased production of the latter.

The Caribbean islands have been urged to revitalize trade among each other so as to put now idle productive capacity to use, particularly in the food processing industry. Revival of trade among the countries of the Caribbean is faced with many constraints related to protectionism, exchange rates and recent failure of trade mechanism such as the Caricom Multinational Clearing Facility. Several countries stress the need to look outside the region for markets even if the regional situation improves. Product development for extra-regional markets (non traditional food crops) is still in the experimental stages for most countries.

IV. NEW TRENDS

Food and agricultural development in the Caribbean is at a turn key phase. Whether the Crop Diversification/Export Marketing is a "panic strategy" or long-term trend remains to be seen. Even if the world economy fully recovers from the recent recession and natural disasters are minimal, leaders in the region appear convinced of the need for a re-development of agriculture.

The Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago put it clearly "...as a major export industry for Trinidad and Tobago at the end of the 20th

century, sugar as we know it, is dead".

The Caribbean countries are moving from a period of traditional export crop orientation mixed with traditional small scale production and marketing organization to a more integrated approach. The marketing area is viewed as the most deficient and a major constraint to achieving success in the adjustment process.

There are several major trends taking place which reflect a movement towards greater market orientation and interdependence:

- Traditional foreign exchange earners > complementary non-traditional exports.

- Single commodity approach > product integration primarily through food processing development.

- Raw material providers > producing end-products.

- Public and private sector cooperation in export development of non-traditional crops.

- Greater management capacity and market information development.

What is noticeably lacking in these trends is the development of small farmer groups action directed towards marketing. This trend is critical, if small farmers are to compete on a cost-effective, market-oriented basis, not just on the basis of their farmer-member ownerships.

These emerging patterns of agricultural development are being affected by the following:

- Greater interdependence of the world food system and the national governments becoming more aware of broad

economic directions for their country's food and agricultural sectors.

- Greater need to develop risk-management tools through crop diversification in order to hedge against price and cost availability in the world and regional markets.

- Increased competitiveness in the extra-regional markets which requires closer cooperation between the public and private sectors.

- Increasing emphasis on food processing and other value added processes to deal with undeveloped resources and unemployment.

V. PROSPERITY FOR WHOM

The Caribbean case presents a very complex picture with no easy path to pursue. In many respects, this situation is similar to that of other developing nations. The main focus is firmly based on export-minded strategies. This strategy will entail technological transformations and management upgrading, which could cause significant labour shedding if agriculture is to survive. The net result may well be added unemployment and deterioration of purchasing power for many.

Yet, agriculture can only make a major contribution to development if it modernizes. The cutlass and the fork should not be the prime farm implements in the 21st century.

5.1 Access to Food

At the heart of the issue are not only problems such as the balance of payments and need to increase foreign exchange, but also the question of the country's capacity to provide sufficient quality food at reasonable prices for all. In spite of the positive

points related to export marketing of agricultural crops, experience has shown it will do little good to grow crops for cash, then turn around and pay the same and to higher to feed a nation. It may be that only a few will benefit in the process and many could suffer as a consequence. If this is the case, then prosperity for the major would be impeded.

The key question is not only "Can a country feed itself?". The more fundamental question is "Can everybody have access to food?". This then is a central issue to the future role of food and agricultural development in the Caribbean and its contribution to peace and prosperity.

Measures to achieve these goals are directly linked to:

1. Developing adequate food production systems.

2. Stabilizing the flow of food supplies by developing efficient food marketing systems.

3. Creating effective demand for food.

The development of these measures will require initiatives at the national, regional and global levels.

National action is indispensable for improving food supplies. National policies should give high priority to food and agricultural production and marketing programmes. Specific attention should be given to educational programmes aimed at changing consumption patterns to improve nutritional levels and utilization of locally produced food. Furthermore schools should enhance agricultural professions.

At the regional level, there exist adequate resolutions and institutions to provide political and technical guidelines for agricultural development in the region. Furthermore, there exist

15 regional and international organizations, plus major bilateral donor agencies working towards food and agricultural development. However, little effective cooperation is noticeable. The Nassau Understanding and the Regional Food and Nutritional strategy aimed at increasing food self-sufficiency have made little progress. Each country appears to be "going it alone" except for some marginal efforts among the Windward islands, i.e. banana exports. Action in the years ahead should build on the regional and sub-regional structures already developed or new groupings identified within the region itself.

At the global level, efforts should be made to ensure that adequate food suppliers are available and means of securing them in case of emergency. Nevertheless, a healthy export trade is one of the foundations of self-reliance.

I am convinced that the Caricom countries have the capacity to produce most of their food needs. What is questionable is their ability to produce food profitably. In most countries, you will hear theres is a glut of fruit, vegetables, pigs or poultry. You will also hear that farmers have fruit rotting on the ground or are ploughing vegetables back into the soil. The critical factor is marketing and producing for that market efficiently.

5.2 Make Haste Slowly

Large investments have been made to increase fruit and vegetable production, but little effort has been made to improve marketing systems either for domestic or export markets or to upgrade the qualities of the produce.

Because of the difficult and risky nature of agricultural production and marketing in the region, large amounts of financial assistance and technical cooperation are needed.

The way we view food and agriculture development directly

influences the design and implementation of policies, programmes and projects. It is extremely important to develop a realistic view of the problem. Rather than going from a pre-determined ideal situation of trying to adjust the real situation to it, the approach should go from the real situation to the possible: build on what works "growth areas", avoid the blind alleys and carefully plan new innovations with close local level counterparts: farmers, managers, policy makers and technical staff. "Make haste slowly" is one lesson I have learnt over the past 24 years of development work. Quick solutions don't work.

For example, the present food and agricultural policy aimed at exports of non-traditional commodities could displace the traditional domestic food producer-the small farmer. Plantation farmers are starting to grow food crops for export. Some of these commodities have been grown traditionally by small farmers. The expectation of favorable profits by selling to extra-regional markets are accelerating this new development.

In ten years, it is likely that only a few larger farmers would export profitably. The end result could very well be that the small food producers would have been displaced in the meantime. Most larger farmers would probably allocate their resources to producing primarily non-food crops for exports. Ultimately, the traditional food grown by the small farmer, representing 50-60% of total demand might have to be imported.

The consequences would be increased use of foreign exchange for food imports and further pressure on the unemployment situation leading to greater risk and instability both for peace and proerty in the region.

A more careful analysis is required when supplanting traditional food systems with hurried strategies aimed at short-run narrow-based solutions. The mixed blessings of sorghum substitute for corn in Mexico is a case in point.

5.3 Risk Sharing

The nature of this outside assistance either can facilitate or distort the agricultural development advances for the benefit of the majority. Too often, policy recommendations, programme and projects designs are based on hurried deadlines and/or rigid beliefs with respect to technology transfer, institutional arrangements and human development needs.

The large scientific management and educational knowledge "bank" to problem solving could be viewed as a referral role to be tapped and adopted when is useful to the most needed areas of development. The local or indigenous knowledge base is in a better position to identify needs, problems and available local resources. Together, changes in financial, technical development and research agendas would occur, resulting in actions which would be more in line with local needs and resources. This would also facilitate more effective utilization of financial and technical cooperative resources. It would also permit local responses to be aware of growing global tendencies which could affect the success or failure of a project. Ultimately, such developmental joint ventures could have significant pay-offs for the future food and agricultural development initiatives.

A risk sharing attitude in problem solving is important. The failure or success then would depend on the involvement and continuity of our efforts. If agriculture today is business, then those involved in its development should share the responsibility of its success or failure. Ultimately success or failure will have to be measured by how well the agricultural and food sector contributed to the well-being (prosperity) for the majority farmers, consumers and the operators in the food system. These benefits in term relate directly to social issues (peace).

VI FINDING SOLUTIONS

It is only through specific action by governments land private sector within a coherent policy framework that food and agricultural systems can be built up and contribute positively to peace and prosperity. Concurrently, organizations such as the Inter-American Institute for cooperation of Agriculture (IICA) with whom I am affiliated and other international organizations and bilateral institutions, can do much to stimulate and promote such actions, and itself carry out operational functions within the system on a cooperative basis.

It is with a call for cooperation that I chose this paper. This is the base for peace and prosperity. Formal institutional relationships exist among national, regional, international levels. The paper work for cooperation exists. Effective cooperation requires joint action. Leadership at institutional, program, technical and project levels is the key; leadership that seek cooperation rather than waits for it.

As we look towards the future, everyone will agree that food and agriculture will play a key role in encouraging peace and prosperity. Without food there is no life. Without sufficient food there is no peace - riots, massive demonstrations, and hunger result.

What is the path of the future? Not everyone will agree on what strategy(s) should be used to accelerate the development of a more equitable food and agricultural system in the world. However, present situation is the fruit of the past and contains the seeds of the future.

It is my experience, that what ever strategy we choose, at least three main issues need careful consideration:

(i) ask yourself who benefits from food and agricultural reforms and how do these changes move the system towards access to nutritious food for everyone.

(ii) Make haste slowly: start from the real situation and determine what is possible, not ideal.

(iii) Take a risk sharing attitude by sharing in the responsibility of the success or failure in future food and agricultural development. The stakes are high for all of us, particularly our children.

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